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STORY IDEA:

FROM ANTIQUES TO MEGA-MALLS, SEMINOLE COUNTY IS A SHOPPER'S PARADISE

Major regional malls, America's largest flea market under one roof, a historic district antique row, factory outlet stores and upscale boutiques are among the overflowing shopping bag of retail opportunities awaiting Seminole County visitors.

The 1.2-million-square-foot Oviedo Marketplace, is a regional mall that opened its doors in March 1998. Developed by The Rouse Company, the mall features eight department stores and superstores, including Macy's, Dillard's, Regal Cinemas, Barnes & Noble, Bed, Bath & Beyond, Footlocker and F.Y.E. (For Your Entertainment). The mall is easily accessible via the Central Florida Greenway (417), Red Bug Lake Road exit.

Elsewhere, the Altamonte Mall, long recognized as one of Florida's largest regional malls, boasts four department stores (Sears, JC Penney, Macy's and Dillards), more than 175 specialty shops, and a dozen outlets in its Food Court. Comprising two stories, it is conveniently located just 1/2 mile east of I-4 in Altamonte Springs.

The Seminole Towne Center in Sanford offers yet another option. This regional mall opened its doors in September 1995. Developed by Melvin Simon & Associates, Inc., the mall features five anchor tenants (Dillard's, JC Penney, McRae's, Macy's and Sears) along with about 130 specialty stores and an innovative array of dining and entertainment options featuring a state-of-the-industry design. Directly fronting I-4 in Sanford, the development created 2,000 permanent jobs.

Close by are several factory outlet stores including Burlington, Ross, Marshalls and Interstate Mall, which recently underwent a multi-million-dollar rejuvenation and expansion project designed to create a 335,000-square-foot "power center" featuring discounters and superstores. Developed by Woodmont Corp., its new lead tenant is CompUSA, a computer superstore.

For a more sophisticated shopping experience, visit the Longwood Village Shopping Center, home to a collection of upscale boutiques and restaurants including Banks Clothiers. Fashioned in a faux Williamsburg motif, it is conveniently situated adjacent to I-4.

Meanwhile, historic district shopping in downtown Longwood and Sanford is equally appealing. Historic Longwood features a cluster of intriguing cottages and gift shops whose merchandise ranges from American country/traditional furniture and collectibles to gift baskets and creative wearables. There's even a Victorian tearoom and gift gallery.

Farther north, a revitalized downtown Sanford is Central Florida's newest antique hotbed. In Sanford, a participant of Florida's Main Street historic preservation project, shopping adventures begin along quaint First Street, the main thoroughfare through town where an eclectic array of porcelain, crystal, china, jewelry, books, furniture collectibles and more delight browsers.

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Of course, no shopping excursion would be complete without a visit to the 350,000- square-foot Flea World, one of the nation's Top 10 flea markets. Covering 104 acres in Sanford and boasting more than 1,700 dealer booths, it is America's largest flea market under one roof.

Shoppers who have secured their bargains can also take advantage of other services offered at Flea World including getting a haircut or a manicure, having a pair of glasses made by an optometrist within an hour, having a dentist fill their teeth or receiving legal counsel from Flea World's resident attorney. An estimated 3 million shoppers visit Flea World annually. Admission and parking are free; the market is open 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. every Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

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